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Written statement* submitted by United Nations Watch, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is hereby circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[2 February 2018]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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UNRWA Must Stop Devastating Palestinians and Inciting Racism

It is time to reform The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), an agency whose values are starkly at odds with those of the UN. As set forth in Articles 1 and 2 of the UN Charter, the UN was founded on principles of maintaining international peace and security and promoting friendly relations among nations. However, UNRWA does just the opposite—it spews hatred and exacerbates conflict.

1. UNRWA perpetuates the Palestinian narrative of the "right of return," whose goal is the elimination of Israel.

UNRWA officials openly advocate for the "right of return," as reflected in recent statements, including by UNRWA Spokesperson Chris Gunness[1] and UNRWA Lebanon director Claudio Cordone,[2] that the refugee crisis will continue as long as there is no "solution." This "solution" is not resettlement, as it would be for the rest of the world's refugees handled by the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Unlike UNHCR, UNRWA is not mandated to find durable solutions for the Palestinians.[3]

As UNRWA expert Einat Wilf has explained, what UNRWA is really giving these Palestinians is the false hope that they will one day be able to return to family homes in Israel abandoned in a war, years before most of them were even born.[4]

This is obvious from recent statements by UNRWA-registered Palestinians who were born after 1948 and never lived in British Mandatory Palestine or Israel:

- Mohammad Afifi, 58-year-old shopkeeper born and raised in Lebanon: "I hold on to UNRWA because I hold on to my right of returning to Palestine."[5]

- Ramy Mansour, 34-year-old born and raised in Syria: "Take everything and return us to our homes. We don't want any assistance or anything, just return us to our country."[6]

2. UNRWA's refugee numbers are highly inflated

UNRWA claims it serves five million Palestinian refugees. In fact, only about 20,000 of the original refugees remain. All the rest of the so-called refugees are included because of UNRWA's unique refugee definition which differs markedly from that of UNHCR. UNHCR defines refugee status according to the Refugee Convention based on a fear of persecution,[7] whereas UNRWA's refugee definition is linked purely to residency during the two-year period preceding the 1948 conflict, and also expressly extends to descendants.[8]

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1 Maayan Lubell and Nidal al-Mughrabi, "Schools, health could be hit by U.S. cut for Palestinian refugee funds: UNRWA chief," *Reuters*, Jan. 17, 2018.

2 David Enders, "Head of Palestinian relief agency in Lebanon defends works as US threatens to cut funding," *The National*, Jan. 11, 2018.

3 Lance Bartholomeusz, "The Mandate of UNRWA at Sixty," *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, Vol. 28, Nos. 2 & 3, 2010, p. 471.

4 Haviv Rettig Gur, "Taking refugees off the table," *Times of Israel*, March 13, 2013.

5 Alexandra Zavis, Noga Tranpolsky and Rushdi Abu Alouf, "In Palestinian territories – and in Israel – jitters over Trump's threat to cut aid to Palestinians," *LA Times*, Jan. 7, 2018.

6 Fares Akram, "Across the Mideast, Palestinians brace for Trump aid cuts," *Times of Israel*, Jan. 16, 2018.

7 1951 Refugee Convention, Article 1.

8 https://www.unrwa.org/palestine-refugees.

In addition, UNRWA stubbornly refuses to find permanent solutions for its refugees, claiming this is not within its mandate. Thus, the anomaly that two million Palestinian "refugees" holding Jordanian citizenship, who UNHCR long ago would have removed from its rosters, continue to be treated by UNRWA as refugees. Similarly, over 2.1 million so-called refugees in the West Bank and Gaza enjoy exactly the same rights and privileges as non-refugee Palestinians there.[9]

Furthermore, there are serious questions as to the accuracy of UNRWA's refugee count, as noted by UNRWA's former General Counsel James Lindsay and others.[10] The recent Lebanese government census which found only 175,000 Palestine refugees in the country,[11] by contrast to UNRWA's claim of 450,000[12] is a case in point. The UN's own audits criticize UNRWA's deficient oversight.[13]

3. UNRWA's curriculum and educational staff promote conflict.

Education comprises more than half of UNRWA's budget (54%).[14] Yet a study published in September 2017 found that UNRWA textbooks promote conflict, not peace.[15] Textbooks claim Jews have no rights in Palestine, deny the existence of Jewish holy places there, and delete Israel from the map. They also promote violent struggle as the path to liberation. Unless change comes from the outside, the curriculum will not be changed any time soon. Following an April 2017 falling-out between UNRWA and the Palestinian Authority (PA) over proposed curriculum changes, UNRWA Commissioner-General Pierre Krähenbühl emphasized that "UNRWA is completely committed to the Palestinian curricula, and that no change will be made..."[16] In November 2017, the PA Ministry of Education reiterated its opposition to any attempt by UNRWA to change the curriculum in a way that would contradict the philosophy of the PA with respect to Palestinian national identity and heritage, *i.e.*, the belief that Jews have no rights in the occupied Palestinian territories and that Palestinians will one day return.[17]

Inflammatory textbooks aren't the only problem with UNRWA education. UN Watch published detailed reports in February and April 2017,[18] exposing 60 new examples of UNRWA educational staff preaching anti-Semitism and jihadi terrorism to their impressionable students.

In typical UNRWA fashion, rather than tackling the issue head-on by firing the antisemitic and terrorist supporting teachers, UNRWA provided them training in what not to post on social media and how to keep social media profiles "private" so that inflammatory social media posts are not publicly viewable.[19] Significantly, UNRWA has never expressed concern about the core underlying problem of students being exposed to anti-Semitism and jihadi terrorism.

Aside from violating the most basic principles of the U.N. charter noted above, such partisanship breeches UNRWA's neutrality as a UN humanitarian agency, and contravenes Article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

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9 James G. Lindsay, "Reforming UNRWA," *Middle East Quarterly*, pp. 85-91, Fall 2012, p. 89.

10 *Id.*, pp. 87-88; Pierre Rehov, "UNRWA: The UN Agency that Creates Palestinian Refugees," *Gatestone Institute*, Jan. 29, 2018.

11 "Census find 174,422 Palestinian refugees in Lebanon," *The Daily Star Lebanon*, Dec. 21, 2017.

12 https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/lebanon.

13 E/AC.51/2017/3, OIOS Audit of UNRWA 2016-17, ¶¶ 53, 57; OIOS Audit of UNRWA 2010, ¶¶ 37-38.

14 https://www.unrwa.org/how-you-can-help/how-we-spend-funds.

15 Dr. Arnon Grois and DR. Ronni Shaked, "Schoolbooks of the Palestinian Authority (PA): The Attitude to the Jews, to Israel and to Peace," *Simon Wiesenthal Center and Middle East Forum*, Sep. 2017.

16 "UNRWA Commissioner-General emphasizes that "UNRWA is completely committed to the Palestinian curricula and that no change will be made in these curricula," *Palestinian Media Watch*, April 17, 2017.

17 "PA Ministry of Education strongly opposes any attempt by UNRWA to change the PA curriculum and schoolbooks," *Palestinian Media Watch*, Nov. 8, 2017.

18 "Poisoning Palestinian Children," *UN Watch*, Feb. 2, 2017; "Canada & UNRWA: Enhanced Due Diligence?," *UN Watch*, April 10, 2017.

19 "Social media and neutrality training for managers & supervisors," *UNRWA*, 2017.

4. UNRWA is a partisan entity with close ties to Hamas

A recent UN audit found that UNRWA was particularly vulnerable to "misappropriation, graft and corruption" in its "procurement, partner selection, food and cash distribution, hiring and promotions, and other areas."[20] The audit expressly criticized the lack of "periodic, unannounced direct inspections of UNRWA shelters and facilities, food distribution centres, schools, and clinics." Unfortunately, this is not surprising given UNRWA's close connections to Hamas in Gaza.

- In June and October 2017, Hamas terror tunnels were discovered under UNRWA schools in Gaza.[21]
- In April 2017, UNRWA teacher and Chairman of the UNRWA Employee's Union in Gaza Suhail al-Hindi resigned amid allegations he had been elected to the Hamas leadership. Other UNRWA employee also have been linked to Hamas.[22]
- During the summer 2014 Gaza war, terrorist rockets were stored on, and likely fired from, the premises of UNRWA schools, according to a UN report.[23]
- Each UNRWA school has a Hamas-appointed representative to recruit students to the Islamic Bloc, Hamas's student group, according to a 2015 report.[24]
- The 2013 documentary "Camp Jihad" shows Palestinian children being indoctrinated to hate Jews and Israel and support martyrdom at an UNRWA summer camp.[25]
- UNRWA employees have exploited their UNRWA privileges to assist terrorist groups like Hamas for years, including by using UNRWA vehicles to transport weapons and terrorists for attacks against Israel.[26]

If the Human Rights Council is interested in advancing Israeli-Palestinian peace, it should join the call for reforming UNRWA.

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20 OIOS Audit of UNRWA 2010, ¶¶ 37-38.

21 "Israel's UN envoy blasts discovery of Gaza tunnel under UNRWA school," *Times of Israel*, Oct. 29, 2017.

22 "UNRWA's Gaza union head, accused of Hamas ties, no longer employed by agency," *Times of Israel*, April 23, 2017.

23 "UN admits Palestinians fired rockets from UNRWA schools," *UN Watch*, April 7, 2015.

24 Paul Alster, "On 65th Anniversary, Looking at UNRWA and its Hamas Ties," *The Algemeiner*, June 12, 2015.

25 Paul Alster, "U.S. tax dollars help fund UN 'hate camp' in Gaza: documentary," *Fox News*, Aug. 24, 2013.

26 Asaf Romirowsky, "How UNRWA Supports Hamas," *Jewish Policy Center*, Fall 2007.